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ABSTRACT

Researchers compared an eleven-week term student teaching program with a fifteen-week semester program. Examined were the effects of the length of the student teaching experience on student teachers' perceptions regarding teaching skill development and on the amount of time spent in actual classroom instruction. Subjects were nine 15-week semester students and seven 10-week term students from two major Michigan universities. All supervising teacher contacts and student teacher observations, visitations, and evaluations were performed by a common coordinator. Data collection instruments included a Perception of Skills Development Form and a Length of Experience Assessment instrument designed to elicit student perceptions regarding the length of their student teaching experience and the pace at which they were given instructional responsibility. The instruments measured participants' perceptions regarding the importance of selected teaching skills, their ability to apply the skill, and the effect of the student teaching experience on skill development. Findings suggested that increased time in a student teaching assignment does not necessarily increase the actual amount of time the student is involved in classroom instruction. Despite this lack of increased instructional practice, students' confidence in their ability to perform teaching skills appeared to increase with additional time. The three teaching skills reported by student teachers as becoming much more important to them were those related closely to student control or discipline. While ten-week term student teachers tended to view their programs as somewhat too short, fifteen-week semester student teachers held the opinion that their program was too long. However, data appeared to support the notion that longer student teaching experience is related to an increase in student teachers' confidence in applying teaching skills. (JD)

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Effects of Increasing Time
Allocated to Student Teaching

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Abstract

Researchers compared an eleven-week term student teaching program and a fifteen-week semester program to examine the effect of the length of the student teaching experience on student teachers' perceptions regarding teaching skill development and on the amount of time spent in actual classroom instruction. The data suggest that increased time in a student teaching assignment does not necessarily increase the actual amount of time the student is involved in classroom instruction. Despite this lack of increased instructional practice, students' confidence in their ability to perform teaching skills does appear to increase with additional time. These findings are particularly interesting because the same university coordinator worked with both groups of students and supervising teachers. The time frame itself apparently influences the negotiations that occur between the student and supervising teachers regarding the students' involvement in classroom instruction. Teacher educators need to study the impact that they might have on these negotiations and seek to gain, through continued research, a better understanding of the relationships between instructional practice and confidence and subsequent success in the profession.

Much of the literature pertaining to student teaching is written, in noncritical fashion, to provide a "handbook" of suggestions and guidelines for students (Byers & Irish, 1961; Houston, Blackington & Southworth, 1965; Ralston, 1980). Authors of similar works have typically described student teaching as the most crucial portion of the teacher preparation program (Andrews, 1964; Baer & Foster, 1975; Drummond, 1977). It is considered to be the unique opportunity for students to integrate their knowledge regarding academic disciplines, psychology, sociology, and teaching methodology into the development of a personal teaching style. It is conceived as "a carefully supervised learning activity for the student teacher which allows him not only to demonstrate but to improve his resourcefulness as a teacher in a real school setting" (Merrill, 1967, p. 28).

However, it is interesting to note that much of the research data which are available regarding the effects of student teaching tend to be critical, suggesting that student teachers become more authoritarian, rigid, impersonal, restrictive, arbitrary, bureaucratic, and custodial by the end of their student teaching experiences (Glassberg & Sprinthall, 1980). Iannacone and Button (1964) revealed that student teachers tended to make decisions about lessons and organizational techniques on the basis of whether they worked to facilitate student control rather than on more rational grounds. Similar research testing the changes in student control ideology which occurred during the student teaching process determined that "student teachers emphasized a significantly more custodial pupil control ideology after student teaching than before" (Hoy, 1967).

Teacher preparation follow-up studies, however, have indicated that teachers place high value on their student teaching--often rating its benefits above all other aspects of their preparation (Freeman, Bradley & Bornstein, 1979). Lortie (1975) has suggested that the positive attitude toward student teaching may be explained as the combined effect of dissatisfaction with education course work and the usefulness of student teaching as the prime opportunity to judge whether one will be an effective teacher "in real life." He notes that "actual teaching gives the student teacher valuable reassurance . . . even modest success affirms the choice of occupation" (p. 71).

The length of student teaching is one facet of the teacher preparation program which has undergone considerable change and standardization during the past century. In 1869, the normal school in Oswego, New York "required 20 weeks of practice teaching for graduation but the maximum amount of time required by twelve other normal schools was only two weeks" (Merrill, 1967, p. 9). Early in this century, student teachers regularly spent an hour or a period a day in a school room concentrating on instruction, while the supervising teacher continued to control the normal classroom routine. Gradually, most teacher training programs developed longer practice teaching programs of approximately one term or semester. Among the arguments influencing these increases were the desires to have the student become more actively involved in the school and its community, and to experience as nearly as possible all the roles of the teacher (Andrews, 1964). In the early 1960's, recommended minimal standards included at least eight weeks of practice teaching, spending a minimum of three hours

a day in the classroom and assuming full classroom instructional responsibility for at least three weeks (Conant, 1963). More recently, debate among teacher educators has centered around lengthening the entire teacher preparation program by a year or more to increase the amount of time a student could spend in an intern-type setting (Smith & Street, 1980).

In the study reported here, researchers compared an 11-week term student teaching program and a 15-week semester program to examine what impact an increase in time allocated to student teaching had on student teacher perceptions regarding teaching skill development and on the amount of time students were involved in actual classroom instruction.

Method

Subjects

One person was hired as a student teaching coordinator by two major Michigan universities to supervise elementary student teachers placed by both universities in a large urban area. Students placed with this coordinator for their student teaching experience in September 1980 were subjects for the study. The group included nine 15-week semester students and seven 10-week term students. School placements were well matched as to inner-city and suburban areas. As indicated in Table 1, the semester student teachers, on the average, were older and more likely to be married and have children of their own than their term counterparts. All student teachers in both groups attended public high schools, and the size and distribution of these

Table 1

Comparison of Group Means for Term and
Semester Student Teachers Regarding
Personal Data and Educational Background

CHARACTERISTICS	UNIVERSITY	
	Term (N=7)	Semester (N=9)
PERSONAL DATA		
1. AVERAGE AGE	26.1	38.7
2. SFX		
Female	86%	100%
Male	14%	0%
3. MARITAL STATUS		
Single	86%	22%
Married	14%	78%
4. CHILDREN		
No children	86%	22%
One or more children	14%	78%
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND		
5. COMMUNITY TYPE		
Rural	57%	33%
Suburban	29%	33%
Urban	14%	33%
6. HIGH SCHOOL TYPE		
Public	100%	100%
Private	0%	0%
7. HIGH SCHOOL SIZE		
Small	29%	33%
Moderate	42%	44%
Large	29%	23%
8. COMMUNITY COLLEGE ATTENDANCE		
Attended CC	71%	11%
Did not attend CC	29%	89%
9. OVERALL COLLEGE G.P.A.	2.8	3.2
10. AVERAGE ELAPSED TIME BETWEEN H.S. GRADUATION AND COLLEGE GRADUATION (in years)	9.3	15.4

schools was essentially equivalent, although the term student teachers were more likely to have graduated from rural rather than suburban high schools. In addition, the term student teachers were more likely to have attended community colleges and reported lower overall college grade-point averages. The semester student teachers reported a substantially larger period of time between high school graduation and college graduation, a fact which was expected in light of the greater average ages of these student teachers.

Procedures

All supervising teacher contacts and student teacher observations, visitations, and evaluations regularly required by the two universities were performed by the common coordinator to assure, as much as possible, uniformity of supervision across the two groups. The coordinator held weekly seminars separately for the two groups but presented identical material.

Data were collected in the 2nd, 5th, and 10th weeks for both groups during group seminar sessions and also at the end of the 15th week for semester students. Data collection instruments included a Perception of Skills Development Form (Freeman et al., 1979) and a Length of Experience Assessment instrument designed by the researcher to elicit student perceptions regarding the length of their student teaching experience and the pace at which they were given instructional responsibilities. In addition, each student teacher kept an instructional time log designed by the researcher to obtain data on the amount of time the student teachers spent in actual classroom instruction.

The Perception of Skills Development Form measures three aspects of perceived teaching skills development: (1) the participants' perceptions regarding the importance of a skill, (2) their perceptions regarding their ability to apply the skill and, (3) the perceived effect of the student teaching experience on skill development. Participants were asked to make judgments on eleven teaching skill areas according to the three categories stated above. The skills included:

1. Knowledge of educational theory and practice.
2. Knowledge of subject matter.
3. Ability to establish rapport with students.
4. Ability to communicate with parents and other teachers.
5. Ability to formulate instructional goals and objectives.
6. Ability to provide a wide variety of instructional strategies and materials.
7. Ability to collect and interpret data regarding student needs and achievement.
8. Ability to maintain active student participation in classroom tasks.
9. Ability to recognize and deal effectively with problems in student discipline.
10. Ability to use effective questioning and interaction techniques in the classroom.
11. Ability to evaluate one's own classroom and general professional performance.

Freeman et al. (1979) reported a reliability coefficient of .85 to .87. In order to measure the changes in perception during the course of the student teaching experience, certain necessary alterations in verb tenses were made for the third category for each data collection period.

The Length of Experience Assessment includes two separate essay forms developed by the researcher. The first form elicited student

teacher perceptions regarding the length of the experience, and the second form requested additional perceptions on the pace at which student teachers were given teaching responsibilities. A continuum allowing participants to rate their perceptions from "much too short" to "much too long" was provided, with an essay question required within each rating. It was believed that by including such a format, the participants' perceptions would be clarified in greater detail. In order to tabulate the data, the ratings were subsequently translated into numerical values from -2 (much too short) to +2 (much too long).¹

The Instructional Time Log was required in order to obtain data on the amount of teaching responsibility experienced by each group. Further, it provided information on the pace at which classroom responsibility was acquired and thus provided a comparison of teaching time between university programs. Instructional time was defined as that time in which the student teacher assumed the role of the classroom teacher. The participants were instructed to record this data daily, excluding time in which they perceived themselves as an extra person in the classroom. Subjects were also asked to compute total possible teaching time per day (see Footnote 1).

Results

Instructional Time Logs

Table 2 compares the amount of time spent in academic instruction both within and between the two sample groups. The data indicate that

¹Copies of the instruments described are available upon request from the author.

there is substantial variation among student teachers in the amount of average daily instructional time. Among semester student teachers, instructional time ranged from 1.6 hours per day to 3.7 hours per day; averaging 2.0 hours per day. Among the term student teachers, instructional time ranged from 2.3 hours per day to 3.5 hours per day; averaging 2.9 hours per day.

Table 2
Comparison of Group Means for Term and
Semester Student Teachers Regarding
Average Daily Instructional Time

UNIVERSITY	RANGE IN AVERAGE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME		AVERAGE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME
	LEAST	GREATEST	
TERM	88 hrs. 2.3 hrs./day	134 hrs. 3.5 hrs./day	142.6 hrs. 2.9 hrs./day
SEMESTER	71 hrs. 1.6 hrs./day	170 hrs. 3.7 hrs./day	152.6 hrs. 2.0 hrs./day

The semester student teachers averaged 152.6 total hours in classroom instruction, while term student teachers taught an average of 142.6 hours. Although the semester student teaching program was 40% longer than the term program, the gain in classroom instruction time was only 9.7 hours, or 6.7%.

The actual daily teaching time reported by the student teachers was compared with the maximum available time, so that a daily percentage of teaching time could be determined. These figures were compiled

into weekly summaries to illustrate the pattern of average weekly teaching time for each student teaching group.

As Figure 1 indicates, term student teachers were given a greater percentage of teaching responsibility earlier in the student teaching experience than were the semester student teachers. The term student teachers were responsible for 50% or more of the academic day by the 4th week, whereas the semester student teachers did not achieve the 50% level until their 9th week. Both groups reported seven weeks in which they were responsible for 50% or more of the classroom instruction. Both groups also displayed a similar pattern of decreased teaching time during the final two weeks of student teaching.

Level of Satisfaction Regarding the Length of Student Teaching

Perceptions of student teachers regarding the length of student teaching are summarized in Table 3. Term student teachers indicated

Table 3

Comparison of Group Scores for Term and
Semester Student Teachers Regarding Their
Perceptions of the Length of Student Teaching

ITEM: WHAT IS YOUR PRESENT FEELING REGARDING THE LENGTH OF THE STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE?			
SCALE: 4 = much too short 0 = about right			
2 = somewhat too short -2 = somewhat too long			
-4 = much too long			
<u>UNIVERSITY</u>	<u>TIME OF EVALUATION</u>		
	5-weeks	10-weeks	15-weeks
TERM	.67	.86	
SEMESTER	-.67	-1.3	-1.6

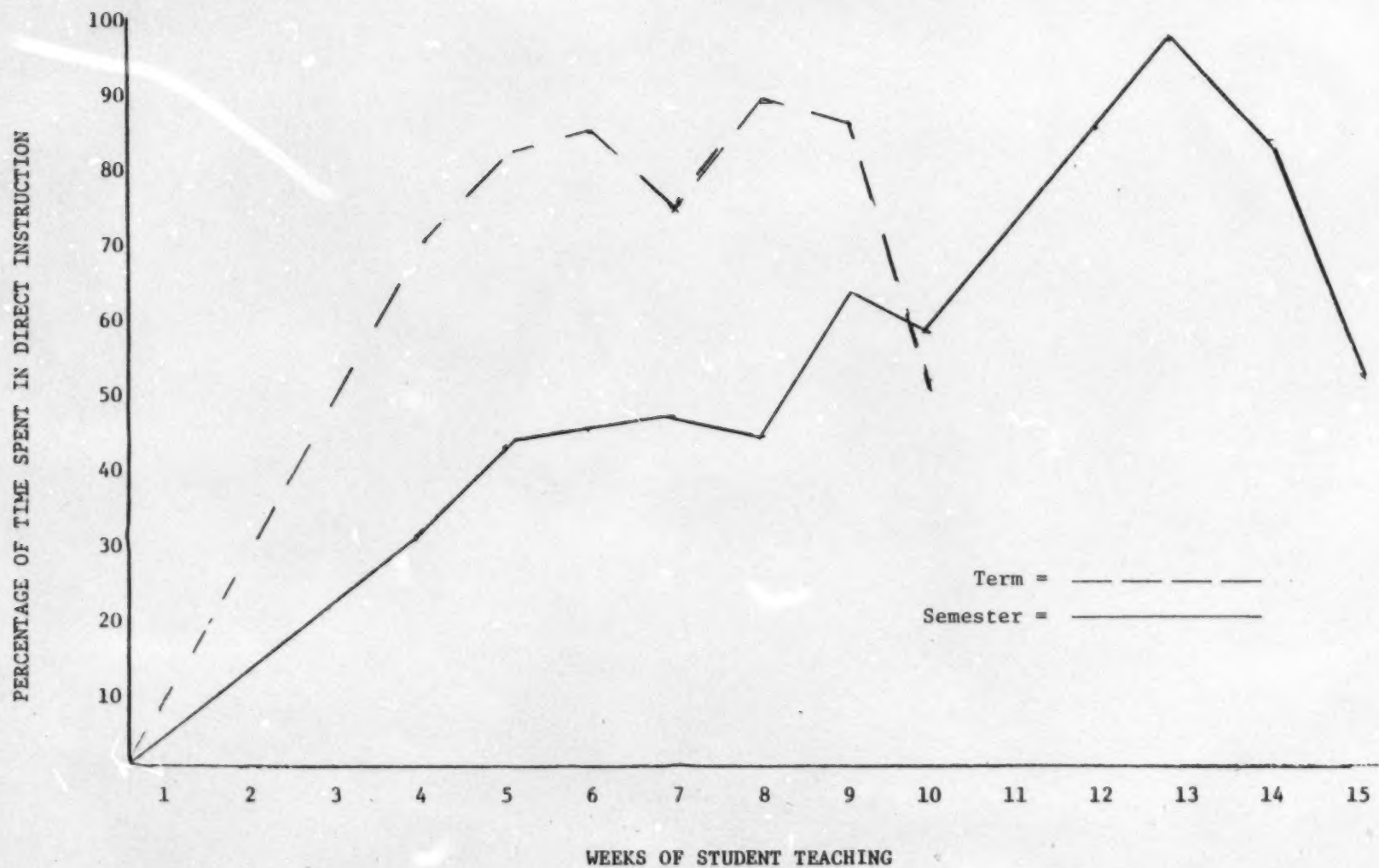


Figure 1. Comparison of average weekly instructional time for term and semester student teacher groups.

that they felt their 11-week student teaching program was about right or perhaps slightly too short. Semester student teachers viewed their 15-week student teaching program as somewhat too long, and that perception became more strongly held as the program progressed.

The direction of student teacher responses were relatively stable over time. Those who felt at the 5-week point that the student teaching program was too long usually felt the same way at the end of 10 or 15 weeks. The specific teaching skills mentioned as needing additional refinement were similar in both groups, and fell into the following categories: (1) discipline, (2) subject area familiarity, and (3) organizational skills.

Skill Development Data

The Perception of Skills Development Form elicited student teacher responses in two areas: (1) the degree to which eleven selected teaching skills were felt to be important to successful teaching, and (2) the degree to which the student teachers felt confident they could apply each of those skills in a classroom setting.

As seen in Table 4, 75% of the term student teachers initially perceived the eleven skills as crucial to teaching success, compared to 47% of the semester students who perceived these skills as crucial. While this initial perception remained relatively stable for term student teachers, the number of semester student teachers perceiving these skills as crucial increased by 10% during the 15-week experience.

Table 4

Comparison of Group Percentages for Term and Semester Student Teachers Regarding the Perceived Importance of Eleven Selected Teaching Skills

TIME OF MEASUREMENT	DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE			
	CRUCIAL	IMPORTANT	LIMITED RELEVANCE	NON-ESSENTIAL
WEEK 2				
Term	73%	27%	0%	0%
Semester	47%	50%	3%	0%
WEEK 5				
Term	74%	26%	0%	0%
Semester	49%	47%	3%	0%
WEEK 10				
Term	71%	27%	1%	0%
Semester	54%	44%	1%	0%
Week 15				
Semester	57%	42%	0%	0%

Three skills, in particular, were perceived by more semester student teachers as crucial as the length of time in student teaching increased. These included: (1) the ability to provide a variety of instructional strategies and materials, (2) the ability to collect and interpret data regarding student needs and achievement, and (3) the ability to maintain active student participation in classroom tasks (Table 5). The perceptions of term and semester student teachers regarding their abilities to apply the eleven skills are summarized in Table 6.

Both groups reported increased confidence in their abilities to apply skills during student teaching. The semester student teachers'

Table 5

Weekly Group Responses by Semester Student Teachers
Regarding the Perceived Importance of
Three Selected Teaching Skills

ITEM #6: "ABILITY TO PROVIDE VARIETY OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND MATERIALS"		CRUCIAL	IMPORTANT	LIMITED RELEVANCE	NON- ESSENTIAL
	WEEK 2	2	5	2	0
	WEEK 5	4	4	1	0
	WEEK 10	6	3	0	0
	WEEK 15	6	3	0	0
ITEM #7: "ABILITY TO COLLECT AND INTERPRET DATA REGARDING STUDENT NEEDS AND ACHIEVEMENT"		CRUCIAL	IMPORTANT	LIMITED RELEVANCE	NON- ESSENTIAL
	WEEK 2	2	6	1	0
	WEEK 5	7	2	0	0
	WEEK 10	5	4	0	0
	WEEK 15	6	3	0	0
ITEM #8: "ABILITY TO MAINTAIN ACTIVE STUDENT PARTICIPA- TION IN CLASSROOM TASKS"		CRUCIAL	IMPORTANT	LIMITED RELEVANCE	NON- ESSENTIAL
	WEEK 2	3	4	1	0
	WEEK 5	7	2	0	0
	WEEK 10	6	3	0	0
	WEEK 15	7	2	0	0

Table 6

Comparison of Group Percentages for Term and
Semester Student Teachers Regarding Their
Confidence in Applying Certain Teaching Skills

TIME OF MEASUREMENT	PERCEIVED ABILITY TO APPLY			
	OUT- STANDING	STRONG	ABOVE AVERAGE	BELOW AVERAGE
WEEK 2				
Term	8%	39%	44%	9%
Semester	5%	28%	63%	5%
WEEK 5				
Term	13%	44%	42%	1%
Semester	6%	41%	47%	6%
WEEK 10				
Term	26%	39%	32%	3%
Semester	21%	57%	22%	0%
WEEK 15				
Semester	43%	45%	11%	0%

initial perceptions showed less confidence than their term counterparts, but they arrived at nearly equal perceptions at the 10-week point. However, at the end of their 15-week program, semester student teachers demonstrated substantially greater confidence in their ability to apply skills than the term student teachers had demonstrated at the end of their 10-week program.

Conclusions

The average amount of actual teaching time for the two groups did not vary substantially despite the four-week (36.4%) difference in program length. Student teachers in the semester program were given teaching responsibility at a slower pace. Term student teachers were responsible, on the average, for 50% or more of the academic day

by the 4th week, whereas the semester student teachers did not achieve the 50% level until their 9th week. These findings are particularly interesting because the same university coordinator worked with both groups of student and classroom supervising teachers. The time frame itself apparently influences the negotiations that occur between the student and supervising teacher regarding the students' involvement in classroom instruction. Teacher educators need to study the impact that they might have on these negotiations.

Early in the experience, term student teachers differed substantially from the semester students in ranking the eleven basic teaching skills as more crucial to their success. This may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that the semester student teachers had had relatively little involvement in actual teaching at the first and second data collection points, while the accelerated pace of the term program may have heightened the student teachers' attitudes toward skill development. It is also interesting to note that the three particular teaching skills reported by semester student teachers as becoming much more important to them are those which related closely to student control or discipline. This finding is consistent with literature in the field which has identified student control as the skill which is given most attention in student teaching.

While the term student teachers, as a group, tended to view their program as somewhat too short, the semester student teachers were more decided in their opinion that their program was too long. The data, however, appear to support the notion that longer student teaching experiences are related to an increase in student teachers' confidence to applying teaching skills. Semester student teachers

demonstrated less confidence in their ability to apply selected teaching skills in their initial perception, but equaled their term counterparts in confidence at the 11-week point and surpassed them substantially by the end of their 15-week program. The relationship between high levels of confidence and subsequent success in the profession needs to be addressed in future research efforts.

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